Isaac of Antioch’s Organ and the Media of Musical Subjects

Glenn Peers

Journal of Early Christian Studies, Volume 26, Number 1, Spring 2018,
pp. 75-109 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/earl.2018.0016*

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/688572

For content related to this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=article&id=688572

[Fri Sep 8 05:27:34 2023] Access provided at 8 Sep 2023 10:27 GMT from University of Southampton

Isaac of Antioch's Organ and the Media of Musical Subjects

GLENN PEERS

This article examines an unstudied text by Isaac of Antioch (active latter half fifth century), in which he described a raucous festival in Antioch, filled with music and revelry. Isaac ruminated on the near-human, near-sentient qualities of musical instruments, and their subjecthood emerged strongly in relation to humans' in his philosophical *memra*. At dawn one morning, Isaac was awakened by a water organ, which dictated to Isaac the psalmody for that morning. This article argues for Isaac's rich exploration of relational mingling of humans, instruments and Psalms, that revealed a milieu of intersubjective richness before God.

> "yes! radiant lyre speak to me/ become a voice"[1]

> "It seemed to her that everyone was shouting too loudly and moving too quickly. This sensation was accompanied by nausea, and she had had the impression that something absolutely material, which had been present around her and around everyone and everything forever, but imperceptible, was breaking down the outlines of persons and things and revealing itself."[2]

Though our technologies suppress this understanding, sound before the modern period was a sign of life. This aspect of sound is now lost to us,

This essay was written while I was a fellow at the Israel Institute for Advanced Study at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 2015–16, and I acknowledge also the support of both the EURIAS Fellowship Programme and of the European Commission (Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Actions—COFUND Programme—FP7). My colleagues in the research group gathered for the 2015–16 academic year gave me immeasurable help with this essay, and I am deeply grateful for their help—especially Virginia Burrus and Derek Krueger. Along with these colleagues, I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to my Syriac colleagues, Robert Kitchen and Na'ama Pat-El, who have given me so much.

1. Sappho, 118, trans. Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 241.

2. Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*, trans. Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa, 2012), 89–90.

Journal of Early Christian Studies 26:1, 75–109 © 2018 Johns Hopkins University Press

but we can gain insights into animate sound through textual descriptions and evocations. One such neglected source is the poem or *mēmrā* by the prolific fifth-century Syriac churchman Isaac of Antioch, whose "On the Vigil which took place in Antioch; and On 'It is Good to Give Thanks to the Lord'" searches out the boundaries between musical instruments and human subjects. Isaac found those boundaries blurred; instruments possessed voices, minds, agency, and in that making and mingling of subjecthood, the living sounds of an Antioch dawn allowed him and his brethren to find union with God.

While this paper argues strongly for taking full account of non-human agency in historical contexts, some scholars resist such posthuman positions. For example, the art historian Christopher Wood has recently made his case for a renewed humanism in art history and criticism that would counteract overemphasis on things' agency in current scholarship. He stresses the ways works of art cannot have "interpersonal relations" because of the relative lack of words or gestures at their disposal. One might add musical instruments, too, of course. Instruments' modalities exhibit clearly the potentialities of things more generally, and their range of communication from mute to voiced is a dramatic way to reveal things' personhood as "emergent, contingent, and unlimited"; for Wood, these qualities are exclusively human-centered.[3] In response to his argument, this essay adduces Isaac's description of silence and voice, exchange of subjectivities, and mingling of entities (instrument, human, divine). In Isaac's text, I argue, is a distribution of agency through a full range of beings that challenges such an argument as neo-humanists (*pace*) would produce.

Here are questions this essay follows, then: How does agency pass among these human and non-human subjects, and why? What impels Isaac's ruminations on voice, speech, reason, and mind? Finally, how do the cultural techniques of psalmody described by Isaac lead to a loss of subjectivity on the part of the monks, their voices stolen by music and their reason assumed by it too? Through the singing of Psalms, the monks othered themselves, giving way to the encompassing voices of music, David, and God.[4]

3. Christopher S. Wood, "Image and Things, A Modern Romance," *Representations* 133 (2016): 132. My thanks to Amanda Luyster for drawing my attention to this particular passage's usefulness and for other stimulating conversations around this issue.

4. This essay takes a divergent path from ones explored by other scholars on performance and hymnography in this period, such as Derek Kruger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). My interest lies primarily in the non-human production of subjects, which can supplement other scholars' careful arguments about performance and poetics exclusively among humans.

ISAAC OF ANTIOCH AND MUSIC IN THE "BEAUTIFUL CITY OF THE GREEKS"

The oeuvre of Isaac of Antioch is still emerging; new studies are appearing to give precision to his output, and several authors of this period have been confused, making scholarship on his work all the more necessary.[5] Isaac appears to have come from Diyarbakir or Edessa, became an abbot in Antioch, and died by the end of the fifth century. The biographical information is sketchy and contradictory, and much of his written work has vanished. But Isaac's output must have been extraordinary; almost two hundred metrical homilies by him survive. And the quality is very high indeed. Isaac had a remarkable flair for poetic description, and the level of originality is very striking. Isaac is an unjustly neglected author, in short.

A description of the opening of his text, "On the Vigil which took place in Antioch; and On 'It is Good to Give Thanks to the Lord,'" should give a sense of the literary strengths of Isaac, which include a striking use of metaphor, an acute eye for the details that give a sense of place, and a light philosophical touch, too. A sense of humor is also not absent from this passage, and his name is attached to a fascinating metrical poem on a parrot that spoke the *Trisaghion* in answer to heterodoxical claims by Peter the Fuller, who reigned as Patriarch of Antioch in 471–88.[6] Isaac likewise had an incomparably sharp eye for common life and incisive observations of it, as well as lyrical leanings.

In fact, the text under discussion begins as follows, "A thoughtful wave struck me, and tossed me from one place to another, to a certain island of dry land situated in an earthen sea. I entered the beautiful city of the Greeks

5. A current bibliography is kept under the heading, "Isaac of Antioch" at http://www.csc.org.il/db/db.aspx, and a useful biographical entry is available on Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_of_Antioch. Edward G. Mathews, Jr., has written two important guides to Isaac's work: "A Bibliographic Clavis to the Corpus of Works Attributed to Isaac of Antioch," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 5.1 (2002): 3–14, and "The Works Attributed to Isaac of Antioch: An(other) Preliminary Checklist," *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.1 (2003): 51–76.

6. Gustavus Brickell, trans., *S. Isaaci Antiocheni, Doctoris Syrorum, Opera Omnia*, Part 1 (Giessen, Rickeri, 1873); Paul Bedjan, trans., *Homiliae S. Isaaci, Syri Antiocheni* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1903), 737. See also http://syri.ac/isaacofantioch. Further consult Emidio Vergani, "L'omelia sul pappagallo: l'esegesi in un testo di Isacco di Antiochia," in *La tradizione cristiana Siro-occidentale (V–VII secolo). Atti del 4° Incontro sull'Oriente Cristiano di tradizione siriaca (Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 13 maggio 2005)*, eds. Emidio Vergani and Sabino Chialà (Milan: Centro Ambrosiana, 2007), 129–57; Tanios Bou Mansour, "Une clé pour la distinction des écrits des Isaac d'Antioche," *ETL* 79.4 (2003): 365–402; and Michel van Esbroeck, "The Memra on the Parrot by Isaac of Antioch," *JTS* (n.s.) 47.2 (1996): 464–76.

from the Eastern sea" (lines 1–3). The wave of meditation that washed over him and cast him about has the hallmark of an Odyssean shipwreck, also recalling romance and adventure episodes in ancient novels, but while those journeys take place in a landscape, the waves wetting Isaac appear at first to have been interior. Yet travel does seem to have been literally the case; Isaac travels to an island of dry land, which is a sandy or earthen sea. The unexpected transition takes a moment to sort out: the waves that move him are meditational, but he is actually "washed up" in the desert that one surmises is a monastery. And as for Odysseus and others, that respite was not sufficient, and he carries on until he reaches the "beautiful city of the Greeks," which is most likely Antioch itself, the city in which Isaac spent part of his career as abbot. This journey then, traverses the spaces between sea and land. A very engaging opening in other words: a journey took place, inside and out, from paradoxical locations (dry-wet, sand-sea), in ways that resist full resolution, like a quick, panoramic montage at the beginning of a film that makes an impression of unsettled (but not negatively presented) mental and physical states.

The journey completed, the lens tightens its focus on Antioch, during the month of *Kānūn*,[7] when (for reasons Isaac does not make entirely clear) the city is suffused with music:

> [I]ts citizens were deprived of sleep by the music. The entire night I was hearing the sound of citharas, hydraulis, and symphonias resounding in front of the rulers' palaces. At the time when sleep is sweet, there was a [discordant] sound to the music, the noise of horns' howling triumphed over their sleep. Feet silent and quiet with the sound of tiptoeing, the clamor chased away by the silence and the pleasant sound of the cithara. The entire city was like a single banquet hall, [and] by the music and games in them, they turned night into day. (lines 4–12)

Each night, the city rings with a great number of instruments: the cithara, the *hydraulis*, *symphonia*, horns, as well as with theatrical performances, which includes musicals and tragedies—so also a great deal of voice. Antioch was transformed in his telling: the entire city became a tavern, with music, singing, and theatre everywhere; it became a confusion of times, as day and night appear interchangeable, and sleep difficult to come by. Isaac also paints quick portraits of the social context: the stratification of the city is confirmed and made audible in the ways that upper-class dwellings (of judges and princes, in particular, and the proud and the rich are mentioned too) were beset by performers and the poor. All of these were

7. Isaac did not make it clear, but it could be either first *Kānūn* in December or later *Kānūn* in January.

looking to persuade the wealthy, presumably, to make gifts to those making riot below their windows.

Moreover, the music is a leveler, if not of class, at least of ability in composition, voice, and skill: "Everyone composed and learned melodies in every genre, so that every person is pleased by his [own] voice, delights in his singing" (lines 13–16, here 13–14). Each person seems to think him/herself accomplished at writing, mastering instruments, and performing, and if everyone did not agree with the other's self-assessment (Isaac doesn't mention explicitly, but the tavern reference indicates a level of aural lubrication by means of wine), self-satisfaction ran high. The light satirical touch in these passages is extremely charming, and his withholding here of critical judgment is an extraordinary element in a period when public drunkenness, indecorous and self-indulgent behavior such as singing, acting, playing music, and music generally was castigated by church officials. Isaac's (initial) forbearance is rare indeed, even if his critical voice returns later in the text.

No less compelling is the interweaving of theoretical and philosophical statements about music, voice, speech, and mind (lines 21–36). In the first place, the *hydraulis*, or water organ, is the most persuasive, but it needs "distinctive speech" (line 22), like the cithara does. From this assertion, Isaac passed onto rumination on the relationship between instrument and human, voice and reason. On the one hand, musical instruments are reasonless entities; they are keen to speak, but without a speaking, reasoning being, they cannot also partake of those faculties.

> Musical instruments resemble human beings without speech, in the way their strings are constrained as if desiring to speak. For since they are being played by articulate ones, they also possess a kind of speech, narrating the cultivated word, but the tongue is not able to express [it]. (lines 23–26)

So, a sympathetic relationship between instrument and performer exists, one that can lead to a fully formed, excessive person, who has voice and reason compounded. The speech of instruments needs to be activated, but their held-back potential is indicated in a striking metaphor: instruments want to orate, but they cannot without lips and tongue—like a mute human—even though they conceive stories in their minds and desire to tell them, "Their voices are like that of a person who has an idea and seeks to tell a story, but has neither lips nor tongue . . . . The reed-pipe and the tongue are joined with the lips of the hydraulis, as one person they lift up equally the song placed between them" (lines 27–32). On the other hand, these instruments have serious agency: the cithara had a sorcerous ability to demand its audibility, the *hydraulis* was able to master listeners, horns defeated sleep, and citharas and lyres entered directly into competition

with voices of their performers. And the reed-pipe and *hydraulis* also took on aspects approaching bodies to match their interior cognitive, narrative capacities. Tongue is joined to reed-pipe, lips to *hydraulis*; the mute is joined with articulate ("The mute is mixed with the articulate so that their speech shall be heard from afar," line 35), in short, though the referent for each of these words is not clear—which is which?

> But on a certain day, there during the sweetness of deep sleep, the hydraulis
> howled with its voice, and alarmed at its sound, I was startled [awake].
> I and the brothers who were with me arose to hasten to worship, and a
> psalm came to us as appropriate for the occasion. (lines 37–40)

By the end of the night, the upper hand has been gained by the *hydraulis*, which sonorates before dawn and wakes Isaac, who in turn wakes his brethren. Terrified, they sing the psalm told them by that instrument, no longer abandoned by lips, tongue, or mind.

At the beginning of the poem, like Odysseus washed up on the shores of Phaeacia, wakened, and then fêted with music and poetry, Isaac found himself journeyed to the lovely city of the Greeks, wealthy and beautiful as that mythical city at the edge of humankind. By the middle of the poem, he also woke from deep sleep (rather unselfconsciously un-monastic sleep, in fact), as if drained by musical exhaustion, and awakened to new surroundings by the strident entry of a water organ. And then the first overtly Christian moment: the organ leads him to pray and gives him, and his brethren, the perfect psalm to sing.

EARLY CHRISTIAN REACTIONS TO MUSIC

Isaac was remarkably open to music, at least in large measure. His attitude is not entirely open, as passages in the *mēmrā* also reveal, but his viewpoint on the musical landscape of Antioch is complex and rich. After the dreamy opening section, he dropped us into the middle of raucous performance. He did not provide a religious rationale, by which he could then dismiss superstition and licentiousness. He got right down to street level, where it seems every inhabitant was out in the city, and happily playing and singing. In the end, Isaac's own prayer is poured into this swimming sound.

Testimony in prose on the role and value of music in the early church, east and west, is not extensive and mostly antagonistic.[8] For the most

8. Translations into English of the primary sources of the eastern fathers are found in James W. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 75–95.

part—and this is a generalization by a non-specialist—music was tainted by secular, pagan custom, as well as by Jewish integration of music into worship. Both were excessively sensual, misguided, and steeped in superseded traditions. Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 310/20–403), to take one of the harshest critics of his own co-religionists and his neighbors, said that the flute (*aulos*) distorts and crazes the body of the player (and presumably all who hear it). Like a Dionysiac reveler one infers, a player of the flute throws one's head back, bows forward, leans to both sides, and in general exaggerates all natural aspects of a human and become the flute's slave; in the end, the player becomes just like a devil.[9] John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407) delivered mixed witness: on the one hand, he was a stern judge of music's slight value for a Christian soul; on the other, he was generally appreciative of the spiritual worth of psalmody. Recognizing the ubiquity of musical accompaniment to the performance of the Psalms in Hebrew tradition, Chrysostom placed it in the history of emergent revelation:

> Some also take the meaning of these instruments allegorically and say that the tympanum calls for the death of the flesh and that the psaltery looks to heaven. And indeed this instrument is moved from above, not from below

---

Studies on early Christian music include Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Rosemary Dubowchik, "Singing with the Angels: Foundation Documents as Evidence for Musical Life in Monasteries of the Byzantine Empire," *DOP* 56 (2002): 277–96; John Arthur Smith, *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); and Egon Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). An important addition to the bibliography is now Maja Kominko, "Make Music with Understanding: Music, Musicians and Choristers in the Miniatures of *Vat. gr. 752*," in *A Book of Psalms from Eleventh-Century Constantinople: On the Complex of Texts and Images in Vat. gr. 752*, eds. Barbara Crostini and Glenn Peers, *Studi e Testi*, vol. 504 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2016), 467–91.

Some noteworthy sources on psalmody include work by Robert F. Taft, *Through Their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw It* (Berkeley: Interorthodox Press, 2006); "Christian Liturgical Psalmody: Origins, Development and Decomposition," in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 7–32; and *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986); as well as Dimitri Conomos, "Change in Early Christian and Byzantine Liturgical Chant," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 5 (1980): 49–63, and Oliver Strunk, *Essays on Music in the Byzantine World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977).

9. *Panarion* 25.4; *PG* 41:325c–28a; *Epiphanius I. Ancoratus und Panarion*, ed. Karl Holl, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, vol. 25 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915), 272; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 78 (160).

> like the cithara. But I would say this: that in ancient times, [Jews] were thus led by these instruments due to the slowness of their understanding and were gradually drawn away from idolatry. Accordingly, just as he allowed sacrifices, so too did he permit instruments, making concession to their weakness.[10]

Not yet privy to God's full plan, Jews had been granted leave to indulge in weaker, dimmer worship. Once the true revelation had been made, however, Chrysostom stated, the purer, spiritual adoration of God was possible. Music was not a full partner in this worship, but it had a valuable role to play, in Chrysostom's view, at least insofar as it provided allegorical precedent. Here Chrysostom imbricates body and instrument, voice and music, spirit and sound:

> Here there is no need of the cithara, nor taut strings, nor the plectrum and technique, nor any sort of instrument; but if you wish, make of yourself a cithara, by mortifying the limbs of the flesh and creating full harmony between body and soul. For when the flesh does not lust against the spirit, but yields to its commands, and perseveres along the path that is noble and admirable, you thus produce a spiritual melody.[11]

This trope of human body and musical instrument has ancient roots—see Sappho's epigram above, for example—and harmonic interplay between musician and instrument can lead, like here, to the overcoming of both the material limitations of the two and to the spiritual transcendence of a perfect melody.

In the Syriac tradition, a similar distrust generally existed, while acceptance of the undeniable place of music needed also to be acknowledged. Ephraim the Syrian (ca. 307–73) was exceptionally eloquent in his poetic treatments of music. On the one hand, like Epiphanius, musical instruments are the devil's devices:

> The evil one made them/ in the image of pipes/ And played songs on them/ agitated songs of contention./ This is a *kinnor*/ whose litigious/ Strings with their songs/ do not sound together in one/ Note of unity./ Its maker is accursed.

And on the other, the *kinnor* (harp or lyre) was chosen by the incarnate God as companions and witnesses:

10. *In psalmum* 149.2; *PG* 55:494; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 83 (173).

11. *In psalmum* 41.2; *PG* 55:158; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 81 (169).

> The Word of the Most High came down and put on/ A frail body with hands./ He set two *kinnors* in balance,/ To his right and to his left./ A third one he set before himself/ To be a witness for them both./ For this middle *kinnor* was to demonstrate/ That their Lord was playing upon them./ For thy hand, O Saviour, there are two *kinnors*,/ The temporal *kinnor* and the *kinnor* of truth . . ./ He played what was the New and the Old . . ./ Who has ever seen two *kinnors*/ The one silent the other eloquent?/ And the silence of the one was not heard;/ The announcement of him was from the eloquent one/ For the silent one persuaded by deeds,/ But the eloquent one by its song./ In word and in deed they both/ Announced the Lord of all.

Expressive, the instrument is a key tool (but, to be sure, an allegorical tool) in the dispensing of the new covenant, even to the point of the *kinnor* being left behind by the risen Lord as a loving consolation for his creation.[12]

The Psalms were the foundation for the assimilation of music into Christian traditions of worship, devotion, and prayer. Chrysostom, once again, warned against the untoward influences of music by taking advantage of the protection provided by God in the Psalms. Unlike the harmful songs broadly sung, the Psalms provide spiritual pleasure, utility, and indeed all philosophy, to those who sing them.[13] Moreover, the Psalms temper drunkenness, excessive pleasure, and gluttony at banquets, when wives and children are taught by a father to rise and to sing these hymns.[14] The Psalms are divinely ordered and performed, and they surpass any human song. The Psalms contain all things, but hymns in turn have nothing human. When one is "instructed in the Psalms, he will then know hymns also, as a more divine thing. For the powers above sing hymns; they do not sing Psalms."[15] Indeed, one cannot really overestimate the importance of Psalms for the early church: "David is first and middle and last."[16]

12. Respectively, *Hymns against Heresies*, 2.7; *Die heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen contra Haereses*, ed. E. Beck, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 169 (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1957), 7; and *Hymns of Virginity* 29.1–9; *Die heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Virginitate*, ed. E. Beck, CSCO, vol. 223 (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1962), 105–108; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 92–5 (202, 204).

13. *In psalmum* 41.2; *PG* 55:157; trans McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 80 (165).

14. *In psalmum* 41.2; *PG* 55:157; trans McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 80 (166).

15. *In Colossenses*, Hom. 9.2; *PG* 62:363; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 87 (186).

16. *De poenitentia*; *PG* 64:12–13; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 90 (195).

ISAAC AND THE ORGAN'S VOICE

Isaac evidently agreed with these positions, in general terms. He did not initially object to music, however, in the secular expressions he witnessed at Antioch, and he described the entire festival with sympathy and wit. Sacred music did not enter into his description, and his mention of a psalm only occurred when he was frightened from sleep and was told a psalm to sing. Nor were he and his brethren struggling to maintain their rigorous monastic regime in the city, it seems, for they were roused by the music from deep sleep. None of the self-abnegation of psalmody for them—at least, not at the outset—that Pseudo-Chrysostom described,

> And at night, all men are dominated by physical sleep and drawn into the depths, and David alone stands by, arousing all the servants of God to angelic vigils, turning earth into heaven and making angels out of men.[17]

David was there, possibly, but if he was, he was speaking through the *hydraulis*, which in turn told the morning's waking psalm.

And yet the "vain voice" of the *hydraulis* needed to be fended off by psalms, and Isaac and his brethren came to scorn the lascivious instruments, "This entire psalm was prepared as if for a contest; grace armed it to chase away impertinent voices, and to eliminate and banish the decadent citharas, for silent ideas (or mute minds) arouse us to fornication and to insane passion" (lines 45–8). Then the second half of the title, "It is better to confess the Lord and to sing your exalted name" became relevant. For now Isaac switched modes, from a tolerant observer to harsh critic, as if the pleasures of Antioch had become excessive; but in any case, the change in tone makes for another dramatic pivot in his poem, here an opening to the moral content of proper song. The psalm arose as defense, now in his telling, perhaps as a way to repulse evil spirits in that pre-dawn hour, and the productive qualities of the previous days' and nights' music have been displaced into despicable voices, decadent citharas, and wayward mute minds. Maybe here is something like Elena Ferrante's nausea evoked in the epigraph at the beginning of this essay, an overstimulation of sound that broke down barriers too thoroughly, that revealed one's vulnerability too readily.

The paradigm for the healing powers of music was the stilling of Saul's madness by David's lyre:

17. *De poenitentia*; *PG* 64:13; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 90 (195).

> And it came to pass, when the *evil* spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him (1 Sam 16.23).

The confusion in Saul's mind led him to believe that he was being serenaded, Isaac said, but David was truly singing to the Lord. Isaac even entertained the possibility that David told Saul the true audience in a low voice. Saul could not understand, but Isaac heard that correction uttered by David and *hydraulis*, "The lyre of David happened to be [there] and I picked [it] up to play in order to banish the raving and foul voices imitating the spirit of Saul. The song of Jesse's son is used to expel evil spirits, and to give reason to the demonized, and discernment to the foolish" (lines 49–62, here 49–52). Isaac explained that Saul believed David was singing to him, to entertain him, but he was untouched by grace. The hearer may well mistake the music for solipsistic pleasure-making, but the true listener knows that David was praising the Lord. The *hydraulis* may not have had the discernment to know, but Isaac knew when he heard it that the *hydraulis* was praising the Lord in psalm. And the *hydraulis*, likewise, was able to bring Isaac's mind to proper discernment and remembrance of David's example:

> The sweet voice of the hydraulis drew my mind to him, and the lyre's strings were loosened, and I was distracted, for the music pleased me. Then the psalm appeared and touched the loosened strings, by the sound that dragged me, and connected me with the wonder of its story. (lines 63–6)

Here Isaac made clear the ways the *hydraulis* and cithara (one assumes both) made the lyre sing. Isaac's description and examination of the power of music in gaining access to God reached its greatest clarity here: "then the psalm appeared and touched the loosened strings." That sound, brought about by the chain of *hydraulis*, lyre, and psalm, immersed Isaac; it captured, drew, and connected him to the phenomenon, facilitating physical and psychic absorption into this totalizing experience of hearing. That experience was, on some level, threatening to Isaac. The *hydraulis* and other instruments brought out strong responses in him, and he certainly accorded these non-human instruments a good deal of power. But then he also needed that plenitude in them in order to describe and assert the greater power the Psalms possessed and gave. Without that initial power, without the channeling and disciplining of music, the victory of psalmody would have had no conviction. It was always a provisional victory; the power of senses and of instruments was always insistent.

And it was the pleasure the instruments gave that led to the appearance of the proper psalm to him. That musical pleasure was a unity of soul and body, since he sang the psalm according to spirit and mind fully, and his tongue tasted it. Also, all parts are linked:

> The tongue was grasped by repetition along with the mind [by] interpretation; ritual arranges the responses, the mind depicts the interpretations. Thought and tongue are linked and with the repetition [and] interpretation, the mind stands upon the four [like] a charioteer upon a chariot. (lines 69–72)

But his mind is the charioteer that is driving the other senses. Like a human "controlling" the instrument, the charioteer constantly needs to master and subdue the powerful creatures that pull him along—but also needs to cooperate with them for a successful outcome. Further on, just the same, instrument and human are integrated, and God is the player: "It has resounded in me because you have made me, for I am the speech of your lyre" (line 85). Isaac and his brethren (and fellow worshippers, depending on the context of the performance of this *mēmrā*) sang their way to God. The *mēmrā* would likely have been performed subsequently, though I know of no mention of such a performance. Its survival attests to an ongoing relevance for monastic devotion in the Syriac tradition, at least. The *mēmrā* would have represented a performative script by which metrical chanting and antiphonal responses would have created means by which Isaac's union with God, David, and musical instruments could have been re-enacted, as could the vivid encounter of music and instruments at Antioch once again.[18] No room for silence (line 119), just like none was possible then in the streets of Antioch.

ORGAN AS AGENT IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

The *hydraulis* was part of a powerful symphony of musical voices at Antioch in Isaac's description, and the conclusion one reaches by the end is that this instrument was persuasive, excessive, and intermittently dominant. The *hydraulis* must have had a booming voice, as organs still do, at church or at hockey games, and it is the lead player on the instrument side in terms of the effects it had on Isaac and the brethren.

18. On this genre, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Poetics of Scriptural Reasoning: Syriac *Mêmrê* at Work," in *Literature, Rhetoric, and Exegesis in Syriac Verse*, eds. Jeffrey Wickes and Kristian S. Heal, *SP* 78 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 5–24.

The instrument was related to the pneumatic organ, and both types were common in public life in the Roman and late antique world.[19] Sometimes hard to distinguish from each other in the sources (textual and visual), they played a role in the circus and other entertainments, and they had associations with imperial ceremony, too. The Obelisk of Theodosius (r. 379–95) in the Hippodrome at Constantinople (Istanbul) shows organs (pneumatic) in an imperial performance, accompanied by imperial family and entourage, and various performers [fig. 1].

Figure 1. Detail, East Face, Obelisk of Theodosius, ca. 390, Hippodrome, Constantinople (Istanbul). Photograph in Public Domain.

19. On the organ, see Michael Markovits, *Die Orgel im Altertum* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 429–33, on the water organ (my thanks to Elena Abramov-van Rijk for this reference), Christopher Page, "Instruments and Instrumental Music Before 1300," in *The Early Middle Ages to 1300*, ed. Richard Crocker and David Hilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 455–84, here 467–8; Edmund A. Bowles, "The Symbolism of the Organ in the Middle Ages: A Study in the History of Ideas," in *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music*, ed. J. LaRue (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 27–39; Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 105–9; J. E. Scott, "Roman Music," in *Ancient and Oriental Music*, ed. Egon Wellesz (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 404–20, here 408–10; and Willi Apel, "Early History of the Organ," *Speculum* 23 (1948): 191–216.

From such public contexts came familiarity with the instrument, and numerous sources play on its power of sound, its various associations, and its particular voice. Petronius (ca. 27–66) in the *Satyrikon* used the associative quality it possessed:

> The slicer came up at once, and making flourishes in time with the music hacked the meat to pieces; you would have said that a gladiator in a chariot was fighting to the accompaniment of a water-organ.[20]

Its percussive effects were described by the Roman poet known as "Aetna":

> Just as in some vast theatre, a water-organ, whose musical modes harmonise through their unequal pipes, sounds its water-worked music thanks to the organist's skill, which starts a small draught of air while causing a rowing movement in the water below—even so the wind, dislodged by the rushing streams, races and struggles in its narrow space and Aetna murmurs loudly with the blast.[21]

The interplay of musician and instrument was also a trope:

> [H]im too whose light touch can elicit loud music from those pipes of bronze that sound a thousand diverse notes beneath his wandering fingers and who by means of a lever stirs to song the laboring water.[22]

Lightness of touch and weight of sound are contradictory cause and effect, and the skill of the player can bring about this sonorousness through his or her ability to awaken the power in the water's voice. The strange power of the organ was evoked by a wide variety of sources. On the one hand, Tertullian (ca. 155–ca. 240) wrote of the remarkable qualities of its engineering,

> Behold the marvelous art of Archimedes, I speak of the hydraulic organ: so many members, so many joints, so many sound conduits, so many combination of tones, so much interplay of tunes, so many rows of pies: and all forming one structure.[23]

20. *Satyrikon* 36.6; trans. Michael Heseltine and W. H. D. Rouse, LCL 15 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 65.

21. *Minor Latins Poets*, trans. J. Wight Duff and Arnold M. Duff, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:387 (lines 297–301).

22. *Panegyricus dictus manlio Theodoro Consuli* (399), lines 316–19; *Claudian*, trans. Maurice Platnauer, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1:361.

23. *De anima*, 14.4, *Quinti Septimii Florentis Tertulliani De Anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink, Supplements to Vigilae Christianae, vol. 100 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 18; trans. Isobel Henderson, "Ancient Greek Music," in *Ancient and Oriental Music*, 198.

And on the other hand, the emporer Julian (330–63) described the strange and wondrous appearance of an organ on leaving the Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople,

> A strange growth of reeds do I behold. Surely they sprang on a sudden from another brazen field, so wild are they. The winds that wave them are none of ours, but a blast leaps forth from a cavern of bull's hide and beneath the well-bored pipes travels to their roots . . . .[24]

The unsettling confusion caused by the *hydraulis* was an aspect, then, addressed by several writers: its machine wonders, its naturalistic form and medium, but also its enchanting aural qualities, which were able to possess and disturb. In his *Deipnosophistae*, Athenaeus of Naukratis (fl. ca. 200) recreated a symposium scene in which the *hydraulis* interrupts the conversation, redirects its flow, and insists on both its indeterminate and determining qualities.

> While a good deal of talk was still going on, the sound of a *hydraulis* was heard from the neighbours' house, very sweet and delightful, so that we all turned round towards it, entranced by its melodiousness. Ulpianus glanced at the musician Alcides. "Do you hear that fine and beautiful sound, you most musical of men," he asked, "which has beguiled us all with its music and captured our attention? It's not like the *monaulos* so common among you Alexandrians, which gives its hearers pain, rather than musical delight." "All the same," replied Alcides, "this instrument, the *hydraulis*, whether you class it among the string instruments or the wind instruments, is the invention of one of my countrymen, an Alexandrian. He was a barber by trade, and his name was Ctesibus." Aristocles recounts this in his *On Choruses*, in some such words as these.[25]

Aetiology of the instrument aside, this passage raises two compelling points for this discussion: in the first place, (though it may be a literary device) the *hydraulis* insinuates itself into the gathering of men and insists on its presence, through its ability to halt and then redirect their conversation—it has social and sensual agency; in the second place, its unclear nature is also remarkable. While Tertullian and Julian came at the instrument

24. *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. William Cave Wright, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980–90), 3:304–5 (2).

25. 174a–c; translation slightly altered from http://www.attalus.org/old/athenaeus4.html. See *Greek Musical Writings. Volume I: The Musician and his Art*, ed. Andrew Barker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 258–303, here 259–60, and also Andrew Barker, "Athenaeus on Music," in *Athenaeus and his World: Reading Greek Culture in the Roman Empire,* ed. David Braund and John Wilkins (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 434–44.

from (strikingly) different angles and arrived at different aspects of the remarkable instrument, they did not concern themselves with musical classification.

Athenaeus's characters could not quite decide or fix the genus of the *hydraulis*. Its sonic qualities were such that the voice it emitted was (perhaps strangely for us) suspended somewhere between different musical technologies, string, and wind.[26] Separated so well in modern classical music, these instruments' effects mixed in Athenaeus's audience's ears, and the *hydraulis* then confounded classificatory neatness. That category-resistant aspect of the *hydraulis* makes it an ideal (grammatically speaking, in both senses of the expression) subject; its media-verb—its qualities of watery/airy, tremulous/sonorous (to speculate a little), solid surround/momentary presence qualities—does the work of creating a "relational middle ground," in which identities destabilize and circulate on the waves of sound. Antoine Hennion has also written about music as mediation, of the ways music is both an object, something produced in concrete social forms, *and* as a strange transcendency that seems to overcome its social determinants.[27] These normally opposing views—of music as bound to the social and beyond limits of experience—find compelling symphony in Hennion's insistence on mediation. Music is not simply translation of ideas or notations to some ethereal effect; it is somehow made and also continues to make and mediate; it falls in this "relational middle ground" so that music of the organ also mediates itself and its relations among all available subjects.

CULTURAL TECHNIQUE ANALYSIS

In this poem, voices of instruments—the water organ (*hydraulis*) most dramatically and forcefully—assumed attributes of humans, even if less-human humans. Their voices have nearly the weight of ensouled beings, working through and on their human "masters," and by the end of a night, they have reversed their subservience and in turn revealed their media mastery of human participants. The organ came by morning to demand tribute,

26. And these we can only ever infer, lacking the magical recording device discussed so memorably by Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop[-Young] (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 59–68, through the short story by Salomo Friedlaender, "Goethe Speaks into the Phonograph" (1916).

27. See Antoine Hennion, "From ANT to Pragmatism: A Journey with Bruno Latour at the CSI," trans. Stephen Muecke, *New Literary History* 47 (2016): 289–308, as well as his *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*, trans. Margaret Rigaud and Peter Collier (New York: Routledge, 2015).

as if the instrument had become a more-than-human that dictates its own psalmody in response. Moreover, as if the organ were more orthodox than the monks, instruments (like animals such as Isaac's parrot—and natural phenomena) channel the divine more sincerely and accurately than humans.

My interpretative framework in this argument is deeply indebted to work done by a diverse group of scholars often identified as followers of the German scholar Friedrich Kittler (1943–2011), or simply grouped under the rubric of Media Studies. This field of study is capacious,[28] and it is admittedly posthuman in its attention to the ways media fundamentally make the world. Kittler deeply admired ancient Greece, not unusual among German scholars historically, but not for their poetry, philosophy or art, but for the invention of the alphabet, and even more particularly of vowels; the alphabet is the processing medium without which the others could not exist. Kittler famously said, "Media determine our situation."[29] Media then prove and decide human agency; media are always already in play, and they write us. Nietzsche wrote that our writing tools are always working on our thoughts, and he meant in some literal way also his own typewriter, which he admitted determined his way of writing.[30]

This poem shows a cultural technique, a way in which sounds, voice and their media re-made subjectivities among humans and things. To put it one way, the habitual grammar of our lives is an assumption that the human is the subject of its sentences; that is, we assume that we are in charge of our worlds, outcomes, and meanings. But cultural-technique analysis allows us to understand a wholly different grammar for our time in the world. Indeed, it undermines all our thinking about our active and autonomous lives. The habitual grammar ought to be strangely reversed: objects occupy subject position, and human becomes object.[31]

28. *Kulturtechniken* (another designation sometimes used) may include "inconspicuous techniques of knowledge such as filing cabinets, writing implements, and typewriters, discourse operators such as quotation marks, pedagogical media such as the slate, singular media that defy classification such as the phonograph, or disciplinary practices such as literacy training." See Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, "Editorial," *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 2 (2010): 5–9.

29. See John Durham Peters, *Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 25–7, for an excellent introduction.

30. Bernhard Siegert (b. 1959) is probably the most important and stimulating scholar in this field. See his *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), here 141 and 253n53.

31. Cornelia Visman, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," trans. Ilinca Iurascu, *Theory, Culture and Society* 30.6 (2013): 83–93, here 83, "Tools prescribe their own usage, and objects have their own operators."

This poem by Isaac reveals that unstable musical space among signs, which are human (less and more so) and other (including music and music-making instruments). The verb, the catalyst for this exchange, must be cultural techniques, the mechanisms by which the system makes itself known. The process is always recursive: the system must refer to itself and make itself observable. A useful way into this notion: music is sound until it has notation, and then it is a system that comments on itself through its notation system. And it leaves the body behind in order to return to it. So, one of the epigrams above: Sappho's lyre was made human by her (attributed) invention of the plectrum (pick), which made its voice a "real voice." The lyre was operated on by this technological innovation and so became the object of desire in its humanness, in its ability to take on voice that equaled the other voice (Sappho's) accompanying it.[32] Not ventriloquism in any sense, this cultural technique reveals the unmarked and unpredictable space where voice and sound operate, and it is that space in which voice and sound are destabilized, differences erased, and deterritorialized.[33]

Voice and sound are the atmosphere in which subjectivities mobilize.[34] The night carried the sounds among the agents, and the sounds' origins became necessarily mingled (are they human, other, or both?). The sounds of voices do more than invert normal subject-object positions: "The medium creates a relational middle ground here, which does not simply amount to a reversal of the two positions."[35] In other words, the media (here music and voice) that overturns the normal syntax of subject-object needs careful attention for uncovering the ways in which historical subjects relinquished their autonomy in search of union with God. The relational field among subjects in this passage is sound and voice, a kind of atmospheric, surrounding sense shared by all subjects in Isaac's narrative.[36] The passage quoted at the outset from Elena Ferrante's novel *My Brilliant Friend* provides a striking and unsettling description of the breaking down and invasion of discrete

32. Ute Holl, "Media Theory (or, and, despite) a Theory of Cultural Techniques," trans. Daniel Spaulding, *Texte zur Kunst* 98 (June 2015): 80–7.

33. Siegert, *Cultural Techniques*, 15.

34. I am thinking of, in particular, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 20, where he states ontologies of literature, based on the paradigm of representation, do not matter when reading for atmosphere and mood: "*they belong to the substance and reality of the world*" (his italics).

35. Visman, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," 84.

36. See the essay by Amy Papalexandrou, "Perceptions of Sound and Sonic Environments Across the Byzantine Acoustic Horizon," in *Knowing Bodies, Passionate Souls: Sense Perceptions in Byzantium*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2017), 67–85, for significant new analyses of soundscape.

entities (i.e. human subjects) by sound. It reveals the immersive quality of sound and also sound's transformative, selfhood-destroying power.[37]

Operating just like the other instruments in Isaac's narrative, the water organ is just the most notable media that simultaneously is suppressed and demoted to an inarticulate (but not dumb) entity; and yet it emerges shockingly as able to demand its own now-human voice in the brethren's suitable psalm. It worked in that relational field, its medium of sound and voice, to produce its own precedence, that was already there all along. We so often take this relation as the opposite, when in fact thinking and doing are always diffused, exteriorized to us also, and with the inevitable result of mutually shaping all possible agents in any given field. The degree of intentionality behind Isaac's description hardly matters; his text knows, even if he did not (though I suspect he did very well), how unstable subjects are when searching for God.

SLAVES AND MASTERS

In the *mēmrā* under discussion in this essay, Isaac made implicit claims about human control of the world and its effects. He also performed some (perhaps) self-contradictory moves in which symbolic and sensual translate each other: who was vying for mastery there? What were the terms of the struggle? And what was at stake for him finally? Unpacking his moves around instrument and personhood in order of narration might help reveal some responses to these questions.

The powerful effects of music made it vulnerable to philosophical, textual controls. Both Plato and Aristotle, whose theories carried significant weight for many centuries, recognized the utility and pleasure of music, but also its dangerous influences, if not checked by self-control. Those two influential voices stressed the superiority of vocal over instrumental music, and Plato in particular decried instruments that took breath to produce sound, because such instruments denied the human voice its expressive primacy in musical performance.[38] Instruments are, in this view, servants to human voice.[39]

37. Wood, "Image and Things," from whom I borrowed the epigraph from Ferrante, even though I use it to opposite ends.

38. See Thomas J. Mathiesen, *Apollo's Lyre: Greek Music and Music Theory in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 159–60, for example, as well as Wellesz, *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, 46–77, and Mladen Dolar, "The Object of Voice," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, eds. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 7–31, here 17–20.

39. For instance, Mathiesen, *Apollo's Lyre*, 92–3.

Moreover, they are slaves to human subjects. They are empty vessels needing to be filled by the exclusive psychic force of humans. But a gap exists between the application of that force to an instrument and the sound heard, and it is the productive space within which life is discovered and created. As Kittler pointed out, "language in 1800 'was full of living sounds,'"[40] and the reason for that loss of "living sounds" on our part is technological, namely the invention of the gramophone, which reduced all sounds to matter and its spatiality.[41] And Kittler rightly pointed to animate qualities of sound in its relations to matter. He cited, among others, this pithy piece of Pythagorean wisdom, "What is the sound of struck metal? The voice of daemons trapped in ore."[42] An example of a living sound, not technically musical, but this passage does demonstrate the existence of a venerable tradition of animistic sound.[43] The striking of the ore is instrumental in identifying presence of life in the metal, and the sound is

40. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 43, quoting Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), "On the Origin of Language," in *On the Origin of Language. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Language. Johann Gottfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 87–176, here 94, which runs this way, in fact, "Take the so-called divine, the first language, Hebrew, of which the greater part of the world has inherited its letters: That in its beginning it was so full of living sounds that it could be written only most imperfectly, is made quite evident by the entire structure of its grammar, its frequent confusion of similar letters, and especially the lack of vowels in it."

41. See the remarks of Steven Connor, "*Scilicet*: Kittler, Media and Madness," in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, eds. Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury, (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 115–31, here 118–23.

42. *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Hermann Diels, 2 vols. in 3 pts. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), 1:279.24–6 (C2); Friedrich Kittler, *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 261.

43. See Samuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 99–101, as well as Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Sound and Senses: Toward a Hermeneutics of Performance," *HR* 26 (1986): 1–33; Steven Feld, "Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea," in *Senses of Place*, eds. Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996), 91–135; and David Howes, "Scent, Sound and Synaesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory," in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Christopher Tilley et al. (London: Sage, 2006), 161–72, as well as Christopher L. Witmore, "Vision, Media, Noise and the Percolation of Time: Symmetrical Approaches to the Mediation of the Material World," *Journal of Material Culture* 11.3 (2006): 267–92, here 276, "Moreover, sound is not simply like the material; it constitutes a form of material action. Yet the chatter of things is all too easily over*looked*. Things are all too often treated as silent."

the dimensionalized means by which we perceive it. A long tradition in western culture merges thing, sound, and life, and therefore recognizes agency and presence. Christian pilgrims spoke of murmuring stones,[44] but made-things also uttered sounds that could be apotropaic, as well as revealing that thing's own faith.[45] So, if our sense of the living aspects of sound has been buried by technology we no longer see, we need to try to re-imagine sound before (Kittler's self-consciously arbitrary) 1800.

And then the ways in which the servant-master relationship of human-instrument played out in late antiquity also need reconsidering. Providing the originary document, as usual, Aristotle discussed the interdependence of tools and slaves and masters. Kittler used this passage in Aristotle to travel to some striking but difficult-to-follow heights, but it is also a basic text for Heideggerian explanations of human manipulation of its world.[46] In any case, Aristotle makes clear that, for example, harps do not play themselves, except in Homeric fantasy.[47] Instruments need us to function, but humans also need them in order to make extraordinary sounds. The slave is needed because tools do not use themselves and do not produce desired effects without slave or apprentice application to them. Analysis needs to be directed, however, toward the reasons (or at least the results, inadvertent and intended) for this suppression of tool and servant. In the

44. See, for example, Glenn Peers, "Object Relations: Theorizing the Late Antique Viewer," in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott F. Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 970–93.

45. Like door knockers, which made sounds to frighten unclean spirits from thresholds, and which also spoke the profession of faith, recently examined by Persis Berlekamp, "Symmetry, Sympathy, and Sensation: Talismanic Efficacy and Slippery Iconographies in Early Thirteenth-Century Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia," *Representations* 133 (2016): 59–109. The lowing of the famous Pisa Griffon was brought about by wind passing through it (with bagpipe-like mechanisms?) when it stood atop the Duomo.

46. Kittler, *The Truth of the Technological World*, 287.

47. *Politics*, 1.2.4–5 (1253b); trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 15–17, ". . . and since, just as for the particular arts it would be necessary for the proper tools to be forthcoming if their work is to be accomplished, so also the manager of a household must have his tools, and of tools some are lifeless and others living (for example, for a helmsman the rudder is a lifeless tool and the look-out man a live tool—for an assistant in the arts belongs to the class of tools), so also an article of property is a tool for the purpose of life, and property generally is a collection of tools, and a slave is a live article of property. And every assistant is as it were a tool that serves for several tools; for if every tool could perform its own work when ordered, or by seeing what to do in advance, like the statues of Daedalus in the story, or the tripods of Hephaestus which the poet says 'enter self-moved the company divine,'—if thus shuttles wove and quills played harps of themselves, master-craftsmen would have no need of assistants and masters no need of slaves."

event, tools and servants possess abilities to produce power and ruling knowledge.[48] Musical instruments are the particular concern, in any case, because their transmissions of sound and its controlling, subject-eliding and manipulative aspects are the messages they transmit (even without the delivery system always in play).[49] In other words, then, the servant relationship is never as "naturally" hierarchical as Aristotle pretended, nor is it as transparent a process of service as each side—servant/tool-master—might pretend and take pleasure in.

In the text, the cithara took a commanding position; it demanded attention and contended with silence to assert its voice. Silence was not its only competitor. Everyone appears to have had ambitions of dominance, and everyone is writing script, controlling instruments, and taking pleasure in this series of victories. Human voices also seek to wrest control from instruments, in attempts by shepherds and tragedians to best cithara and lyre. But the terms of the engagement were only laid out mid-way, because they involve the age-old question of who is human and why. Human and instrument make sounds, both appear to have what everyone would call voice, and both have stories to tell. They do those things collaboratively, for Isaac: humans blow, strike chords, hit keys, and instruments comply to some degree by allowing voice to come out. (And skill is beside the point here: Isaac painted a magical world where everyone is Mozart. I imagine, however, something closer to the "Town Musicians of Bremen," by the Brothers Grimm.) So, the deficit position for instruments (or surplus for human): instruments have no reason or speech, unless played by a human already possessed with speech. And yet the instruments had desire (strings are eager to speak and even to orate) and they were given something like a mind to conceive their stories, even if left with it in the text's murky realm of metaphor. Another deficit for them: the instruments have no way to pluck strings, blow pipes, press keys. They have no bodies that are like ours, clearly, but they have elements that resemble them; compressed strings are like bodies readied to interject, to speak; strings' tongues are deficient, as are their lips. But then the *hydraulis* comes clos-

48. Markus Krajewski, "Ask Jeeves: Servants as Search Engines," *Grey Room* 38 (2010): 6–19, here 9.

49. Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Bote, Übertragung: Kleine Metaphysik der Medialität*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 115–6; trans. Krajewski, "Ask Jeeves," 11, "Precisely because those who are communicating cannot reach the other, the question becomes relevant, whether the messenger will preserve his heteronomic status and the neutrality invested in it, or whether he will project his messages as a sovereign and manipulator, and therefore omit, distort or contrive."

est to having those features, when its lips sustain voices, and the mute is joined to articulate, just when body parts interchange. And the concord was wondrous . . . .[50]

SOUND AND IMMERSION

The concord that resulted is simply divine. The space between these signs (human and instrument, voice and sound) is the very space in which unity is achieved among all living things and God. Here is the recursive space of media mingling, of active relation, mediation, and interchange. Isaac described a corporeal technology, the making of music, and that technology both depends on and exceeds the corporeal. But then beautiful-sounding recursions: at just the moment when the technology abandons the body, it returns to it with lips, tongue—not to say also mind, speech, reason. A usefully vivid image might be Epiphanius's description of the *aulos*, the instrument that needs the player's body (it seems), but then comes to own it (to the player's detriment—and presumably anyone watching, judging by Epiphanius's sour description). Here the body returns to itself transformed and diabolized by the (seemingly) helpless servant, the inert instrument.[51] Sappho asked her lyre to speak, invented the plectrum, and her technology allowed that voice to emerge; but then who came really to speak? What then was in fact a body?[52]

50. Holl, "Media Theory," 84, "Art, it could be said, proceeds the other way around: it stages images, sounds, and textures in such a way that cultural and medial procedures are exposed in them, so that we can conduct ourselves within them, this way or that."

51. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 32: "*To play* music is to make it sound, and its sense is in its resonance (its composition is subjected to it, or destined to it). But music itself, in order to be music, plays on the sonorous resources of bodies that are struck, rubbed, plucked, and it *plays them*."

52. Holl, "Media Theory," 86, "Media-thinking applies to the caesuras that suggest how and by what means elements are bound together as a system. The cut is decisive here. Media-thinking observes space between signs: it observes corporeal technologies where technologies abandon the body in order to return to it, recursively: 'yes! Radiant lyre speak to me/ become a voice.' Sappho, they say, invented the pick, the plectrum. Cultural technology research reveals technologies of play that point to the inhalation before every act of singing, and to the meter that organizes it. And it emphasizes that, under the conditions of gramophony and its reproducibility of physiological non-sense, nobody can know what a body is. The investigation of cultural technologies responds to the relationship between signs, technologies, and social behavior. Questions of media keep this relationship constitutively open."

The first third of the *mēmrā* ends with a horrific outburst by the *hydraulis* that wakes a terrified Isaac. Typically, the manner of narration is immediate and unexpected. The terrifying sound is another classical and biblical topos, which Isaac was likely accessing. A famous fearful blast, for example, comes in book 18 of the *Iliad*, when Achilles's anger extends around the walls of Troy; his shouts resounded and reached inside every Trojan heart, and pressed terror hard on each of them (*Iliad* 18.218–29). And the blowing of the *shofur* on Mount Sinai (Exod 19.1–25) announced to the Israelites the terrifying presence of God and the fearful colloquy between God and Moses. This strange power of sound to envelop and enter is a sign of presence: the *shofur* is God's arrival and attendance, Achilles's dreadful shout his engulfing, fearful vengeance before it arrives. As Jean-Luc Nancy (b. 1940) writes,

> When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something itself that identifies *itself* by resonating from self to self, in itself and for itself, hence outside of itself, at one the same and other than itself, one in the echo of the other, and this echo is like the very sound of its sense.[53]

That presence circulates and encompasses, merges and alters every entity. But that presence is still lack: the sound arrives, transforms, and departs as sensual evidence of other. And that lack can be just as terrifying or unsettling as presence, and unmaking of difference even while presence is largely deferred or denied.[54]

Isaac woke and summoned his brothers, and a suitable psalm came to them. By line 65, the psalm had made itself manifest and had begun to play its song:

> Then the psalm appeared and touched the loosened strings, by a sound that dragged me, and connected me with the wonder of its story. I sang

And I thank Aaron J. Koller for bringing to my attention this strongly evocative passage from the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berakhot, page 3b: "For so said R. Aha b. Bizana in the name of R. Simeon the Pious: A harp was hanging above David's bed. As soon as midnight arrived, a North wind came and blew upon it and it played of itself. He arose immediately and studied the Torah till the break of dawn." (BT Berakhot 3b)

53. Nancy, *Listening*, 9.

54. Dolar, "The Object of Voice," 26–7, "It is the part that can never be simply present—but is not simply absent, either: the object voice is the pivotal point at the intersection. It discloses the presence and gives ground to its imaginary recognition—recognizing oneself as the addressee of the void of the Other as well as recognizing one's own voice in a self-presence—but it is at the same time what inherently lacks and disrupts any notion of a full presence; it makes it a truncated presence, which covers the lack."

> according to what is written equally in my spirit and in my mind, and with repetition, I tasted its interpretation of the story. (lines 65–8)

This small climax to a narrative unit is the final moment of body uncertainty and indeed reversal, for the *hydraulis* began the dictation of the psalm, which the lyre or cithara picked up and finished. Isaac never stated overtly which psalm they all sang, though the double title of the *mēmrā* gives it away, and the strongly intertextual fabric of the *mēmrā* from line 75 carries it forward. The first three verses of Ps 92 run this way in translation:

> It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp (NIV).[55]

This psalm is also the prayer sung in the early morning in many Christian traditions. The remainder of the psalm is threaded through the last third of the *mēmrā*, and clearly, Isaac was calling on the most appropriate and relevant text for his purposes. But he also performed a sophisticated commentary on his own experience in that pre-dawn rousing from sleep. The *mēmrā* becomes the half-submerged psalm that music had caused to emerge into consciousness. The psalm-strewn final passage of the *mēmrā* became its own answer to that music's charms and dangers, as well as its own musical integration into that aural environment, once evoked by Isaac and then recreated by performers/worshippers afterward.

RELATIONAL FIELDS OF SOUND

But in any case, the wave of meditation that rushed upon Isaac at the beginning of the text has now re-emerged as a waking surge that pulls him back to the surface. Brought back to himself and his vocation, Isaac felt the presence, attendance, and fear of God, but in which guise, he could not be certain; voice, body of God's *shofur* surrogate in Antioch? And/or the equivalent of Achilles's vengeful shout (other classical parallels could be adduced, but it's best to start with Homer, in most cases)?

Friedrich Kittler's last project, left incomplete at his death, was a study of *eros* and Greece, which focused strongly on the sophisticated alphabetic basis for writing, musical notation, and numerals in Greek.[56] The

55. This identification was made by Warren Woodfin, to whom I owe many thanks.

56. See Friedrich A. Kittler, *Musik und Mathematik. I: Hellas. 2. Eros* (Munich: Fink, 2009); as well as John Durham Peters, "Assessing Kittler's *Musik und Mathematik*," in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, 22–43; Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Kittler and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 82–119; Claudia Breger,

project has so far received mixed press, and it has also not yet found an audience in the Anglo-American academic community, since the books remain untranslated. But one rather fascinating endeavor within this project was searching out the original location of the Sirens, who failed to snare Odysseus. With his team, Kittler identified the island of Li Galli off the Amalfi coast as the site of the Sirens' home, and he placed two women singers on shore while he had himself rowed back and forth in narrowing approaches. This experiment of course has a long history of proving Homer a documentarist, but Kittler also has a scheme in mind: proving that unlike versions related by Homer from the mouths of Circe and Odysseus, the hero did in fact alight on their island: how else could he have heard and understood their famous enticement to him (*Od*. 12.188–91) and then relay it? This literary game could, just possibly, be directed at Isaac's claim to have a psalm occur to him after waking with such a start: could he also have gotten closer than he claimed? And did he truly recognize the tune and voice of the *hydraulis*, but keep it to himself, not wanting to be seen succumbing to the Sirens?

And other questions could well be: when did the sound translate to specificity in speech in the psalm; how did he come to recognize meaning in the terrifying noise; what happened in that gap between hearing and understanding? Isaac passed from some kind of sonic alarm, he wrote, to emerge into sense, and that space of emergence, I would argue, is where human retreats and cultural techniques take over to create a relational middle ground among all entities at work there. What really happens in that space as sound or music emerges into meaning for us has been, naturally, subject for speculation. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) tried many times to try to come to grips with this process, and he wrote, for example,

> But when I hear a tune with understanding, doesn't something special go on in me—which does not go on when I hear it without understanding? And *what*?—No answer comes; or what occurs to me is insipid . . . . *Signs* of understanding may accompany hearing.[57]

Here, as Lawrence Kramer (b. 1946) eloquently points out, Wittgenstein stumbled over the "positive indefiniteness" of "music's mode of utterance."[58]

"Gods, German Scholars and the Gift of Greece: Friedrich Kittler's Philhellenic Fantasies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.7–8 (2006): 111–34; and John Armitage, "From Discourse Networks to Cultural Mathematics: An Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler," *Theory, Culture & Society* 23.7–8 (2006): 17–38.

57. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 28 [162].

58. See Lawrence Kramer, *Expression and Truth: The Music of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 16. And see also, Karmen MacKendrick,

Perhaps the solution Isaac arrived at, when attempting to find meaning in that wakeful blast, was to listen and to reply in its own mode of utterance, a psalmody that joined all voices reverberating that early morning on some untold day in fifth-century Antioch.[59] The utterance gives a sense of weight to that day, a thinking, thoughtful sound that echoes in that text still.[60] It is like the productive gap is still in play among divine, human, and thing for us.

The echoes destabilize identities among persons (however defined), among voices and sounds, deterritorialize all these entities, ultimately defer union; but as long as sound and voice are possible, union can be tentatively, incompletely sustained—for as long as anyone there draws breath. And, of course, Psalms are the harmony-prayers; they create unity among all beings, earthly and heavenly; and they stretch in these ways across time, place, person. Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 328–73) wrote the classic position with regard to the Psalms and Christian selfhood:

> With this book, however, though one does read the prophecies about the Saviour in that way, with reverence and with awe, in the case of all the other Psalms, it is as though it were one's own words that one read; and anyone who hears them is moved at heart, as though they voiced for him his deepest thoughts . . . Not as the words of the patriarchs or of Moses and the other prophets will he reverence these: no, he is bold to take them as his own and written for his very self. Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; every one is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself. It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he sees himself and his own soul, he cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing, and stir them also to a like reaction.[61]

The Matter of Voice: Sensual Soundings (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 117–37.

59. On the ways the Psalms operated to forge identity among Syriac Christians, see David G. K. Taylor, "The Psalm Commentary of Daniel of Salah and the Formation of Sixth-Century Syriac Orthodox Identity," *Church History & Religious Culture* 89 (2009): 65–92.

60. On the relationship of music and history, see the remarks of Ardis Butterfield, "Music, Memory and Authenticity: Representing Sound in History," in *Representing History, 900–1300: Art, Music, History*, ed. Robert A. Maxwell (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 19–30.

61. *The Life of Antony and The Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. R. C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 107–8, with emendations from http://www.athanasius.com/psalms/aletterm.htm. See also Columba Stewart, "Psalms and Prayer in Syriac Monasticism: Clues from Psalter Prefaces and their Greek Sources," in *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries*, eds. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony

Athanasius folded voices together in his defense of psalm performance: David wrote them in time, God wrote them before it, and we perform them in the eternal present. The sound and voice of them transcends entities, and yet it is their performance that brings transcendence, surpassing and locating the position of an entity in time and place and voice. The inhabiting of speaking or singing subject by David/God is verbal, but also musical accompaniment: "It resounds in me which you have made me, for I am the speech of your lyre . . . ." The assertion of humility is always present to some degree (compare line 88 to Psalm 8.5, for example), but it is also a trope of assimilation, integration, dividuation in human positions before the divine. See, for example, this declaration by Martyrius (first half of seventh century):

> You should understand this from the case of the harp or lyre or cymbals when they make a sound (I Cor 13.1): does the sweetness of the melody and song come from the harp or the lyre, or does it belong to the person plucking the instrument and singing? You who are endowed with reason, should receive instruction from what is not endowed with sense, and you should realize that the Spirit of God is playing on your tongue, and singing his melodies in your mouth.[62]

And the Holy Spirit is the media by which agency spread throughout creation (see lines 105–6). It is the "music of the great Spirit" (line 107) that breathes life through creation. And so, words are less important than performance; the technology of speaking, singing, occupying a mute mouth with the words is sufficient for mingling of bodies with the holy. Once again, John Chrysostom:

> And even if you do not understand the meaning of the words, for the time being teach your mouth to say them, for the tongue is sanctified by the words alone whenever it says them with good will.[63]

Like the strings of the cithara, its tongue, and the lips of the *hydraulis*, human lips and tongue can taste union, even if voice and sound tentatively

and Derek Krueger (New York: Routledge, 2017), 44–62, and Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, "L'Épître à Marcellinus sur les Psaumes," *VC* 22.3 (1968): 176–97.

62. Noam Maier brought this passage to my attention. See *Martyrius (Sahdona): Oeuvres spirituelles III. Le Livre de la Perfection, 2me partie (Ch. 8–14)*, ed. André de Halleux, CSCO, vol. 252, Scriptores Syrii, vol. 110 (Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1965), 25 (8.79); *The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 234–35.

63. *In psalmum* 41.2; *PG* 55:158; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 81 (168).

fail. And women occupied some lower rung of the psalm ladder in patristic ordering, since Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 313–86) cautioned that women, like those not yet understanding the words (though presumably understanding just fine) should just mouth the words or recite quietly so no one else could hear, holding them inside like cithara and *hydraules* until "permitted" (see again necessary illusion of autonomy and mastery some humans [sc. men] need and insist on).[64] Where does human and instrument begin and end on this spectrum? By the end (line 85), Isaac also described God as his own lyre, that is, Isaac's own; a strong inversion. Clearly, this spectrum is not straightforwardly vertical (instrument-human-divine), but horizontal and spread and full of intersubjective potential. Once released from muteness, the diffused relational field of sound and voice in the Psalms extends again to any and all hearers, as Athanasius stated, and so encourages a like reaction in all those swimming in this field. In this way, the indeterminate psalm of Isaac and his brethren will keep us forever suspended in the about to be stirred to like-minded adoration, about to be mingled in voice, sound, mind, speech, reason, and about to be roused to song by being terrified to wakefulness.

Glenn Peers is a Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin

APPENDIX

Homiliae S. Isaaci Syri Antiocheni, ed. Paul Bedjan (Paris, 1903), *Mēmrā* 68.815–821, "On the Vigil which took place in Antioch; and On 'It is Good to Give Thanks to the Lord,'" trans. Robert Kitchen.[65]

64. *Procatechesis*, 14; *PG* 33:356b; trans. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 75–6 (154).

65. A partial translation from *S. Isaaci carmen de vigiliis antiochenis et de eo, quod donum est confiteri Domino*, in *S. Isaaci Antiocheni, Doctoris Syrorum opera omnia: ex omnibus, quotquot exstant, codicibus manuscriptis cum varia lectione Syriace Arabiceque primus edidit, Latine vertit, prolegomenis et glossario auxit*, ed. Gustav Bickell, 2 vols. (Giessen: J. Rickeri, 1873–77), 1:294–98, can be found in Henry George Farmer, *The Organ of the Ancients from Eastern Sources (Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic)* (London: W. Reeves, 1931), 49–51. A translation into the German can be found in Markovits, *Die Orgel im Altertum*, 317–9; P. Simon Landesdorfer, *Ausgewählte Schriften der syrischen Dichter: Cyrillonas, Baläus, Isaak von Antiochien und Jakob von Sarug*, Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, vol. 6 (Munich: J. Kösel, 1913), 815–21; and Gustav Bickell, *Ausgewählte der syrischen Kirchenväter, Cyrillonas, Baläus, Isaak v. Antiochien und Jakob v. Sarug, zum ersten Male aus dem Syrischen übersetzt*, Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, vol. 4.1.2 (Kempten: J. Kösel, 1872), 164–70.

(815) [1] A thoughtful wave[66] struck me, and tossed me from one place to another,
to a certain island of dry land situated in an earthen sea.

I entered the beautiful city of the Greeks from the Eastern sea
during the month of Kānūn[67] when the sleep of its citizens was captured by the music.

The entire night I heard the sound of citharas, hydraulis,
(816) and symphonias resounding in front of the rulers' palaces.

At the time when sleep is sweet, there was a [discordant] sound to the music,
the noise of horns' howling triumphed over their sleep.

Feet silent and quiet with the sound of tiptoeing,
the clamor chased away by the silence and the pleasant sound of the cithara.

The entire city was like a single banquet hall,[68]
[and] by the music and games in them, they turned night into day.

Everyone composed and learned melodies in every genre,
so that every person is pleased by his [own] voice, and delights in his singing.

The shepherds were contending by their mouths with the citharas,
and the actors[69] by their voices were making light of the sound of the lyres.

This being the month of Kānūn the [different] orders in the city revived,
and on any night music was not wanting in it.

Under the judges' windows and at their rulers' gates,
physical musical instruments were set out in orderly array every night.

[Only] a little thing is lacking, a hydraulis should have a person [to play it].
[for] a person is superior to the cithara by distinctive speech.

Musical instruments resemble human beings without speech,
in the way their strings are pulled as if desiring to speak.

For since they are being played by articulate ones, they possess a kind of speech
(817) narrating the cultivated word, but the tongue is not able to express [it].

66. *re'yana*, "mind."

67. There are two months of *Kānūn*: *Qdām* (1) *Kānūn* = December; *Trīn* or *'Ḥray* (2) *Kānūn* = January.

68. Payne-Smith does not offer "tavern," although, the root is *štâ*, "to drink."

69. Literally, "tragedians" (Syriac, *ṭərāgōdē*).

Their voices are like that of a person who has an idea
and seeks to tell a story, but has neither lips nor tongue.

The unfortunate folk sing before the palaces of the rich,
enduring a rigorous vigil for the flattery of the proud.

The reed-pipe and the tongue are joined with the lips of the hydraulis,
and as one person they raise up equally the song placed between them.

The hydraulis with its low voice amplifies their soft voices,
and joins with them so that their music may reach the top of the palaces.

The mute is mixed with the articulate so that their speech shall be proclaimed afar;
their sweet harmony which I heard with them was wonderful.

[2] But on a certain day, there during the sweetness of deep sleep,
the hydraulis howled with its voice, and alarmed at its sound, I was startled [awake].

I and the brothers who were with me arose to hasten to worship,
and a psalm came to us as appropriate for the occasion.

We cursed the vain one's voice, but then the psalm was pleasing
when it scorned the instruments that impudence had lined up.

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing your exalted name";[70]
for a worthless one gives thanks to a human being and sings to a mortal name.

This entire psalm was prepared as if for a contest;
grace armed it to chase away impertinent noises,
(818) and eliminate and banish the decadent citharas,
for silent ideas arouse us to fornication and to insane passion.

The lyre of David happened to be [there] and I picked [it] up to play in order to banish
the raving and foul voices imitating the spirit of Saul.

The song of Jesse's son is used to expel evil spirits,
and to give reason to the demonized, and discernment to the foolish.

For his servant [David] sang to King Saul [calming him] from [his] raving state,[71]
and perhaps this is the psalm David had sung to Saul.

70. Ps 92.1 [Pešīṭtā].
71. 1 Sam 16.23.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,[72] but not you, O transgressing king,
and to sing your exalted name,[73] but not this son of Qish,[74] as one may say.

The senseless Saul did not realize that David was singing in this way;
he thought that he was entertaining him, even though he was singing to the Lord.

The raving one did not realize, David said, that he does not sing to him,
perhaps in a low voice he repeated this story before Saul.

This is also encouragement for me, and grace touched me;
"It is good to give thanks to the Lord and to sing your exalted name."[75]

The sweet voice of the hydraulis drew my mind to him,
and the lyre's strings were loosened and I was distracted for the music pleased me.

Then the psalm appeared and touched the loosened strings
by a sound that dragged me, and connected me with the wonder of its story.

I sang according to what was written equally in my spirit and in my mind,
(819) and with repetition I tasted its interpretation of the story.

The tongue was grasped by repetition along with the mind [by] interpretation;
ritual arranges the responses, the mind depicts the interpretations.

Thought and tongue are linked and with repetition [and] interpretation;
the mind stands upon the four [like] a charioteer upon a chariot.

It was proceeding to the verses so that their minds might show
and give proof of how to drive away the disturbing music.

[3] *It is good to give thanks to the Lord*,[76] for there is no [other] grace such as this,
and to sing your exalted name,[77] for there is no [other] music such as this.

Let us show your grace in the morning,[78] and make me worthy, Lord, of your vigil,

72. Ps 92.1a [Pešīṭtā]. (Citations from Ps 92 are all from the Pešīṭtā.)
73. Ps 92.1b.
74. That is, Saul (1 Sam 9.1–2).
75. Ps 92.1.
76. Ps 92.1a.
77. Ps 92.1b.
78. Ps 92.2a.

so that at night we may sing before you, and rise up early in the morning before you.

Let us show your grace in the morning, and at night your faith,[79]
for worthless are those who do not believe in you; they are being troubled every night.

I will play on a ten [string] harp[80] [and] with all my senses I will sing to you,
and I will stretch out the ten fingers of my hands and praise your greatness.

"You have gladdened me, Lord, by your works, and resounded at the work of your hands";[81]
everything your Sign has fashioned, and a human being is the work of your hands.

It has resounded in me because you have made me, for I am the speech of your lyre;
for the sake of all that your commandment has created, your handiwork has been exalted in me.

How great are your works, O Lord,[82] yet, is one who understands them greater than them?
Since I know that your handiwork is great, am I greater than all created by you?

Your thought is much deeper;[83] I have begun to search for you, yet you are in the depths,
You are deeper than my intelligence, yet your thought is within me.

A senseless man does not realize[84] that he is now singing at home,
so that he might in that vigil inherit eternal life.[85]

A fool does not understand this,[86] how much more beautiful our songs are than his,
he discards the better portion and sings to vanity.

You, O Lord, [are] the Most High Eternal, and you give an eternal reward;[87]

79. Ps 92.2.
80. Ps 92.3a.
81. Ps 92.4.
82. Ps 92.5a.
83. Ps 92.5b.
84. Ps 92.6a.
85. Thanks to Kristian S. Heal for several critical comments on these lines.
86. Ps 92.6b.
87. Ps 92.8.

for the wicked is like grass,[88] he flutters about and is despised since he sings to it.

The enemy of the Lord perishes, and one who acts iniquitously is scattered about,[89]
and whoever sings in order to please him is defrauded by his labours.

Toiling, he sings to the worthless one, and your music ceases from him;
he rejects the holy words and tills filthy music.

You have exalted my horns like a bull, and you have anointed me with perfumed oil,[90]
and my eyes saw your salvation, and with my ears I heard your promise.[91]

For just like the palm-tree the upright flourishes and like the mysteries of [the cedar of] Lebanon he will grow,[92]
their leaves will never wither, nor also will their virtues fall.

For he is planted in the house of God and in his holy generations;[93]
wherever the Spirit hovers and gives drink through its breath.

In the music of the great Spirit, *and like the mysteries of [the cedar of] Lebanon he grows*;
his bud renews in his old age,[94] for he drinks the youthfulness of sounds.

He becomes ripe as well as sweet,[95] for he hears the mysteries of the Holy Spirit,
and shows that the Lord is upright[96] and rewards his vigilants.

(821) And while being strong and capable of deceiving, *the iniquity of deceivers is not in him*.[97]

Let us give thanks to Christ who spares us from these vain things,
and gives us holy vigil with spiritual hymns.

Ours is the first rank, give thanks, my brothers, that you are worthy
of the service of heavenly beings, for it depicts for us their wings.

88. Ps 92.7a.
89. Ps 92.9.
90. Ps 92.10.
91. Ps 92.11. Pešīṭtā reads, "My eyes see my enemies, and my ears hear the evil ones rising up against me."
92. Ps 92.12.
93. Ps 92.13.
94. Ps 92.14a.
95. Ps 92.14b.
96. Ps 92.15a.
97. Ps 92.15b.

May your voices perform with vigilance in order to reach the palaces on high,
and may we praise Christ, the King of Kings at his dwelling.

Play your strings and shout so that our clamor may be mixed with that of the watchers,
for between their voices and ours, there should be no opportunity for silence.

May the Living One render us worthy at his coming, so that you may be found at his right hand,
and through the petition of his friends may mercy purify me, so be it, Amen.